

## Mary Width TESTIMONY 10/29/2013

Good Morning, my name is Mary Width and I am a resident of Farmington Hills. I am a Registered Dietitian, and I am a Senior Lecturer in the Dietetics Program at Wayne State University in Detroit. In addition, I am the Co-Course Director of Clinical Nutrition at Wayne State's Medical School.

I would like to address and provide clarification for two main points that have come up in previous testimony; the difference between registration and licensure for dietitians and nutritionists, and the difference between a nutritionist and a dietitian.

Obtaining a professional credential is a credible way to demonstrate proficiency in a field. Credentialing is a process used to establish the qualifications of professionals and to assess their background and legitimacy to meet predetermined and standardized criteria for education and training. Registration of dietitians/nutritionists provides a tangible recognition of our knowledge and experience in the field of nutrition.

Licensure, on the other hand, is a process by which the state grants time-limited permission to an individual to engage in their occupation after verifying that he or she has met predetermined and standardized criteria, including education and practical training. The goal of licensure is to ensure that the licensees have the minimal degree of competency necessary to ensure that public health, safety, and welfare are protected. Professional associations do not grant licensure, governmental agencies do.

To summarize the point, while Registration ensures that we have the appropriate education and training to provide medical nutrition therapy (MNT), licensure provides us with the authority to practice MNT, and at the same time and even more importantly, it prevents those who are unqualified from doing so.

This brings me to my second point: What is the difference between a dietitian and a nutritionist? The simple and straightforward answer is nothing. The terms "dietitian" and "nutritionist" have been synonymous and interchangeable in our field since it was established. Those that are credentialed as RDs have never questioned that we are both dietitians and nutritionists. The confusion as to what the terms mean has come about because the title "registered dietitian" is legally protected and that of "nutritionist" is not, which has allowed unqualified individuals to use the term "nutritionist" to refer to themselves. That is why both titles were included in the Michigan licensure law; so that there would no longer be confusion as to who is qualified to call themselves a dietitian and a nutritionist in Michigan.

For individuals who find themselves in the middle...for instance, someone who has a nutrition degree but not the practical training; or someone working in the weight loss industry but is not an RD....a better question might be, "Who would be included in the licensure of dietitians and nutritionists?" The answer is the law was established in Michigan to identify those individuals that are qualified, through education and practical experience, to provide nutrition assessment and medical nutrition therapy. The law was not designed to prevent individuals and groups to operate businesses that sell health foods, health products, and dietary supplements. Nor those that provide general nutrition advice, information or classes. Nor was it designed to prevent other licensed practitioners who have nutrition services within their scope of practice to continue providing those services. In fact, the law is quite specific about allowing these individuals and businesses to continue providing their services, as long as they do not use the protected titles of dietitian and nutritionist. People will not be losing their jobs in Michigan if dietitians/nutritionists are licensed. Licensure would simply allow the public to easily identify which individuals are qualified by education and experience to provide MNT, and is not an attempt to control any market.

The extremely wide variation in knowledge and training in the field of nutrition is exactly why dietetics licensure in Michigan is vital. It is the state's responsibility, through licensure, to keep Michigan residents safe by ensuring that the people who are providing MNT are qualified to do so.